THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) Yes, Sir. In respect of licence agreement signed with six private basic telephone service operators with effective date in 1997-98, it was stipulated to provide a minimum 10% of total Direct Exchange Lines (DELs) to be commissioned as Village Public Telephones (VPTs). This percentage was translated into absolute terms based on bid/tender documents keeping in view the committed targets for DELs and the figures for number of uncovered villages as indicated in the tender documents.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) Does not arise in view of (b) above.

(d) Delay in commissioning of VPTs has deprived the people of the concerned villages of telecommunication coverage facility. Liquidated damage charges to the tune of Rs. 53.75 crores were recovered from six operators for the delay in commissioning of service as well as for the delay in provisions of DELs and VPTs.

Gram Sanchar Sevak

1188. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether "Gram Sanchar Sevak" (GSS) scheme launched recently, by Government has received encouraging response from the rural households;

(b) if so, names of the telecom districts in Orissa where GSS scheme has been launched; and

(c) the steps taken by Government to convert this project into a full-fledged scheme across the country especially in remote areas of the State?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Gram Sanchar Sevak (GSS) scheme has been launched in Balasore, Baripada, Bhubaneshwar, Bolangir, Cuttack, Dhenkanal,

Keonjhar, Koraput, Phulwani, Rourkela and Sambhalpur telecom districts of Orissa.

(c) BSNL has taken up the matter with Department of Posts for expansion of this scheme across the country including the State of Orissa.

Media Lab Asia

1189. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Media Lab Asia (MLA) was launched during June, 2001;

(b) if so, the details including the collaborators, proposed duration of the project and the amount estimated for the same;

(c) whether any of the Indian Scientific Community suggested the need of this project;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) if not, the source of originating this project;

(f) whether $ 5 million was proposed for using the name "Media Lab Asia";

(g) if so, the details thereof; and

(h) the present status of the project and the amount of work done to facilitate access to information in rural areas?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI SU. THIRUNAVUKKARASAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Media Lab Asia programme started as a joint effort of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA and the then Ministry of Information Technology, Government of India. The programme was conceived in two phases: a one year exploratory phase, followed by a full scope programme of nine years. A budgetary outlay of Rs. 65 crores was approved for the exploratory phase of the programme.

(c) Yes, Sir.